

Hiplife

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to come to a better understanding of the organization, the richness and the diversity of the urban popular music industry in Tamale¹, a cosmopolitan African city in the Northern Region of Ghana, which is growing, changing and expanding very fast at the moment.

The focus of this research is on the different social - and economic structures of the local urban popular music cultures. Special attention was given to the informal music market, the airplay of the radio stations, the subaltern position of some musicians, the organization of music education in the area, the music sales of the vendors and distributors, the public domain versus copyright law, music ownership, piracy, the opening of numerous music NGO's, and the flood of music recording studios in and around Tamale.

We organized two surveys, the first one on "Music Identities and Identities in Music" conducted among the people of Tamale, and a second one on "Correlation of Gestural Musical Audio and Perceived Expressive Qualities" conducted in several Senior Secondary Schools in and around Tamale.

We were very impressed by the presence of the various musical talents in the area, the creative minds of the local male and female artists and the use of advanced computer software and applied multimedia in their music compositions. The popular music industry in Tamale is quite young (with the introduction of electricity in the region roughly 25 years old). Due to this urbanization and globalization processes the local urban popular music industry has been able to establish a new urban music style in the area which they call "Hiplife".

Apparently, hybridization processes can be found in the continuity and change between traditional and popular urban music cultures and in the intercultural dynamics and cultural identities between Hiplife, contemporary highlife, a reggae revival, Bollywood influences and in particular, the "Sahelian" Factor in Northern Ghana².

It is this rich mix of the Northern and Southern, internal and external, old and new, secular and sacred, male and female that will all contribute to the future development of Tamale's popular urban music culture.

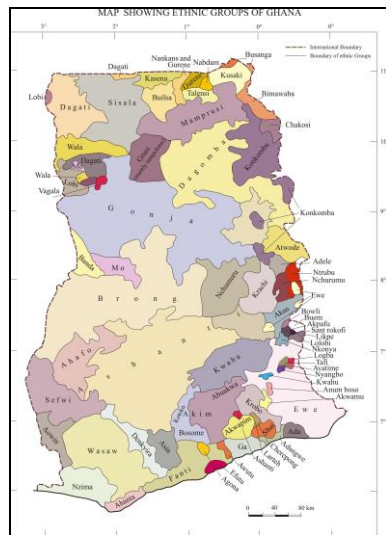
Key Words: Hiplife, Tamale, urban music, self-regulated and uncontrolled music market, cultural hybridity and transformations, the African Idiom.

1. Introduction

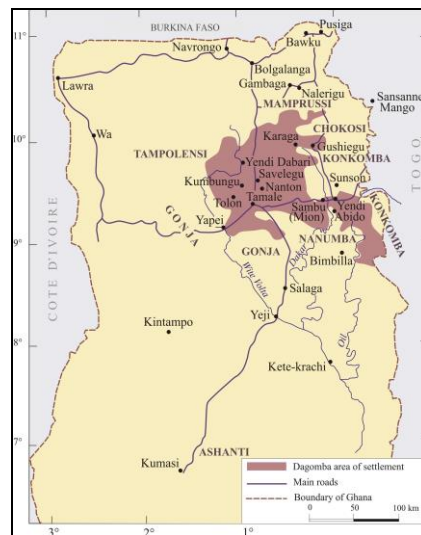
The first fieldwork for this research was done during the period July – August 2008 and was on the topic of the organization of the radio stations in Tamale. At the same time we conducted a survey research on the perception of traditional music and dance with students of the SHS Senior High schools in and around Tamale. We conducted a survey research in Savelugu, Tamale, Yendi and Tolon on the sales of popular music and the consumption of it among the youth in Tamale. We questioned 2860 people in Tamale with the help of the local radio stations. In this survey we investigated which formats they bought, and looked at illegal downloading of music from the internet for sales.

The second round of the fieldwork was done during the period June – August 2010, and was focused on the informal music business, copyright and music ownership in Tamale.

The research questions for this paper are on the topic of the music business in Tamale. Why is the local music business not prospering like the large music industry of the Akan in the southern parts of Ghana, while there is a lot of potential talents in and around the city? How come the formal music market in Tamale has collapsed while the informal uncontrolled market is doing well?



Map 1: Map showing ethnic groups of Ghana.



Map 2: Map showing Dagomba settlements and main roads.

2. The cultural environment in Tamale as a cosmopolitan city

Tamale is a medium - sized West African cosmopolitan multicultural city located in the heart of the Savannah belt in modern Ghana³. The city is located about 600 km from Accra and covers an area⁴ of 750 km². Historically, Tamale is a conglomerate of small villages which they call '*fong*' or suburbs in town. It is at the moment one of the largest and fastest growing and expanding conglomerate in Northern Ghana. Built on solid rock, makes it especially in the hot season the temperature in the city always warmer than the surrounding villages.

It is the administrative and commercial centre of the Northern Region in Ghana. As a commercial place, it functions as an economic driving force in the area for different 'modern economic institutions', described as the *haute finance*, and represented here in Tamale by several commercial banks. The theoretical framework of reciprocity, redistribution of goods and free trade is well described in the work: "*The Great Transformations*" by Karel Polanyi⁵. The several banks around the Central Bank area are forming a cultural clash with the 'traditional economic institutions' the informal markets, the self-regulated - and uncontrolled markets⁶, such as small scale sales and trade as a form of redistribution of goods in the area.

Tamale is also the central gateway for international - and national transport systems to Burkina Faso, Togo, Nigeria and Niger, and the different major towns and villages in the Northern Region. As the "Administrative Centre", it is the hometown of the University of Development Studies (UDS). It has several institutions of learning, including 'The Teaching Training College', The Institute of Ghanaian Languages and The Institute of Cultural Studies.

The city has a combination of traditional and modern architecture and way of life styles. There is a traditional renaissance of "*the modern production and reproduction of the tradition*" and modernization and aspirations to modernity and modern life styles. The many businesses and economic activities of the formal markets includes commercial banks, telecommunication providers, small and medium sized shops, restaurants, commercial radio stations, transportation, internet cafes. The informal market consists of a huge variety of several stalls and street vendors in and around the central market place and the several bus stations as its main providers for distribution.

Tamale has a mixed population of approximately 361000 people⁷. The Dagomba – who speak *Dagbani* - are the most dominant ethnic group in the area. The Dagomba people are divided into two royal families or clans "*the Aburu*" and "*the Andani*" clan. These two royal clans are living in tension and conflict, and brought several clan disputes, better known as the: "Yendi Clash" to *Dagbon*. This clash has a deep historical background and a

very deep impact on the political and social - cultural life in Tamale, and the music market in particular. This family conflict and dispute has escalated in the several “*The Yendi Skin Affaires*”⁸

Besides the dominant Dagomba ethnic group, there are several communities from migrated people in the city from within and outside Ghana. From the Southern parts of Ghana there is an Akan community with mainly settlements of Ashanti - and Bono people. Among other migrated people are settlements of the Ewe -, Basari - and Kasena people. From outside Ghana there are settlements from the Hausa people of Nigeria, there is a community of Togolese people, the Mossi from Burkina Faso and the Zambarma of Niger.

All these emigrated cultures have settled in a specific area in town, with each a traditional chief and a council of elders. The area where the Hausa people live is called by the Hausa name ‘*Zongo*’⁹ and is considered as one of the first foreigner settlements in Tamale. They are highly involved in the several economic activities of the city.

3. Theoretical discourse

Our interest goes to the different forms of temporality in the lived music cultures in Tamale, the reflection of the cultural past in the present lived music cultures. Phenomenon as ‘*traditional and modernity*’ in urban popular music are investigated from a creative artistic point of view where the musicians and their performers have a central role and position. These cultural creative transformation processes and transitions of traditional music and dance into popular urban art forms are here defined as “*cultural hybridity*”. The liminal space and reciprocal character of the young music business in Tamale has been carefully studied and mapped. The different cultural idioms and modes of transition, transformation processes from the “*African Idiom*” to a more Afro - American and Western inspired idiom were investigated. We looked at the various cultural spheres and networks of the dominant Dagomba culture and the interaction between traditional established circuits and new artistic creative circuits in Tamale.

On the one hand we also looked at phenomenon like liminal space/subaltern position of some of the musicians and the performers within the dominant cultural sphere of the Dagomba community and the consciousness this hybrid identity has among its performers and audience. This new urban music scene is not standing alone but is influenced by various interactions of the surrounding traditional and modern music cultures. We observed carefully how these transformation processes took place and how they established a new urban music scene linked with a “*pop identity*”. This new

“*hybrid identity*” is linked with the different music styles found in the city, and can be considered as subcultures and could be described as “*neo tribes*”.

We notice that this music subcultures and neo tribes, from the young generation of artists in Tamale, are working on their own subculture identity which is in a mode of transition, a liminal space and can be described as an emerging identity. This hybrid identity is located within a liminal space of transition which is on the one hand bound on traditional Dagomba customs within the tolerance values of this traditional Dagomba culture and Afro – American Western influents identity. The tolerance of the dominant Dagomba culture and the demarche of the globalization discourse lies at the basis of this new hybrid identity as an in- betweenness of two liminal zones, the traditional - and the modern identity.

On the other hand we looked at transformation processes and transitions of traditional music and dance cultures and its influences on the urban music scene within the urban popular music scene in Tamale. The demarche of cultural hybridity and its globalization discourse in Tamale linked to the young dynamic music business and its artists.

It is interesting to note that the dichotomies like “*traditional and modernity*”¹⁰ and “*continuity and change*”¹¹, in this part of Africa has its own creative interpretation.

The term “modernity” confuses, whether we want it or not the analytical and the empirical levels, if only because the academic theories of yesterday have been cumulatively incorporated in African popular consciousness whether of the invention of tradition colonialism from the desire of national identity and autonomy in the 1950s – 1960s¹²,.

The demand of recognition, continuity - of some traditional values such as the lyrical use of traditional Dagomba proverbs in Hiplife songs - and change, modernity, linked to the “urban popular music scene” is at large and is a topic what is concerning Tamale so far was neglected in African Studies. It has its own track that is different for the traditional music and dance scene in the city.

Doing so we could observe the music scene in Tamale as a growing self - regulated market and we saw how the artists were building bridges between the different fascinating dynamic cultural spheres in the city. Hiplife, a reggae revival, gospel music, contemporary highlife music and Bollywood inspired film music. These are the different genres with which the musicians are classifying their own music and we took over their classification.

The Hiplife music that we could hear and observe in Tamale is a fusion of American and hip hop music, Nigerian hip hop music and highlife

music, a Ghanaian popular dance music - and elements of the local Dagomba traditional music and dance idiom. Among this traditional styles are *simpa yila*, *tora yila*, *kuraya kuraya*, *bihi yila*, *lung' yila* and variety of new composed songs.

In its purest forms, a Hiplife song is a music style that comes from the Southern parts of Ghana. Hiplife music became widely known in Ghana from the 1999's. A year later, in 2000 it got to Tamale, and was introduced by the music group K.K.C.¹³ (Ku Klux Clan).

A Hiplife song (from the Northern Region) has two basic elements¹⁴. It has a sampled groove taking from an authentic highlife song, and a rap, or rhyme, to be delivered over the beat in one of the Ghanaian local languages, such as Dagbani and a mix of English and Pidgin English. The permutation, variations and transformation processes on the basis of the traditional African idiom seems to be endless. Ten years later, now that the group K.K.C. is out the line, new creative artists have come to town with new styles and new grooves just like Ahmet Adam and Shaakira, Sheriff Ghale, Abu Sadiq, Deensi, Abada, Kawastone, BFG's, Prince Dee, Tarimbia and many others.

4. The location and the structure of the popular local music business

The self-regulated music market and informal music business in Tamale has a very centralized character. It is located in a few blocks around the Commercial Bank area, the Central bus station, STC bus yard. During the day, the Commercial area is during the daytime a very busy place and mobile. It is located on the junction with the Savelugu Road who leads to Bolgatanga and Burkina Faso and with the Salaga Roads who leads to Togo. We could distinguish several different types of vendors: especially stall road vendors and small shop vendors are highly involved in the informal music business. However, the most common type of street vendors are the ones who sell at the roadside and use a table and an umbrella with advertisement of phone providers.

Several cars with speakers on the top of a car and equipped with laptop and CD burners are driving from market to market to sell pirated copies of local music. This music is mostly provided by radio DJ's because they have access and the technical expertise of the new multimedia technology.

During the night this area transforms into the local prostitution quarter mixed with local food vendors and mobile music street vendors. Several artists as Abu Sadiq with his very popular song "*Azindo*"¹⁵ and the group Deensi with their song "*Gala Gala*"¹⁶, have made songs on this topic.

These songs are regularly used by local NGO's to inform the local kids on topics as deviant behavior, sexuality and prostitution.



Picture 1: A radio presenter at Radio Savannah. Tamale June 2008.



Picture 2: Mobile car vendor at the central bus station. Tamale. July 2010.

The music business in Tamale is divided in two large sections. The formal music markets were controlled by the I.K brothers who are Akan from origin, and a newcomer Paringani Productions, a Dagomba. They had for a long period the monopoly over the local music business, until the musicians decided to make production in self-release.

It is said by some of my informants that around the year 2005 a Zambarma from Niger came and settled in town and started to sell compiled versions of pirated foreigner music in town under the control and supervisor of a certain Mr. Alhassan who has at the moment c.a. 23 different Zambarma mobile music vendors roaming in town for him.



Picture 3: A Zambarma road vendor at the Central Bank Area. Tamale, August 2010.



Picture 4: Medium size music shop. Tamale, August 2010.

MUSIGA, The Music Association of Ghana is a union of musicians and has a representative and chairman, Mr. Della and an office with staff in Tamale. It is located at the back of the Cultural Centre. It is an open Centre for artists, musician and people of the performing arts. The Cultural Centre

and MUSIGA in particular are functioning as an open platform. Doing this they are organizing on several occasions' music workshops for the local musicians. Official music education institutions are not found in Tamale, however education of music exists in the family sphere and among friends. Due to this contradiction there is a huge variety of music genres in the city. Most of the musicians are autodidacts or coming from musical families of the traditional idiom.

The music business in Tamale and in the Northern Region is organized on an individual bases. A musician or artist not only performs, but also manages, produces and distributes his/her products. The type of record companies like we know from the western model doesn't exist. Nowadays there is a slide shift in distributing music on mp3 format by telecom providers just like Vodafone, MTN and One Touch. Musicians from southern Ghana just like Daddy Lumba, and especially their music is owned by international multinational telecom providers. On the other hand there are some newcomers like Parinjani Productions, a mobile phone and photo-shop near the Central Mosque who focuses on providing music for phones and iPod's. On the other hand nowadays we could see that musicians like Sheriff Ghale, Abada, Deensi and Abu Sadiq are releasing CD's and VCD recordings in self – release.



Picture 5: Sheriff Ghale in his home music studio. Tamale, August 2010.



Picture 6: A live performance at the football stadium by the local Hiplife group Deensi. Tamale, August 2010.

5. Preliminary conclusion

It is very difficult to say how it happened that the local music industry in Tamale has collapsed. Out off the data we can only state at the moment that: “ The local music industry in Tamale has collapsed due to different factors that occurs at the same time in the city such as ”: The local musicians are blaming the migration of the Zambarma people to Tamale and their economic activities around foreigner pirated music. However according to the Ghanaian copyright law the Zambarma road vendors are strictly bound

to foreigner music sales. Secondly the high unemployment rate under the local youth and the link to little crime, illegal piracy and the introduction of multimedia technology, lack of music - business education, lack of implemented marketing strategies concerning the local music business, insufficient communication between artists, producers, distributors and radio stations / radio presenters”.

We have very much enjoyed this research work on various aspects of contemporary music life in Northern Ghana, the development Music Industry and the musicians and stakeholders that service it. We looked very closely to the materials and listened to the recordings and testify that they are of a high standard and are valuable contributions to the knowledge of the various problems and issues, including stylistic and copyright issues connected with the growing popular music industry in Ghana.

It is now roughly 25 years that the popular urban music scene in Tamale exists. In these 25 years of urbanization processes we could see different forms of transformations from the African traditional music and dance idiom to the more hybrid urban pop idiom. We are looking forward what the next decade of cultural mix will bring, and how the local musicians in Tamale will deal with these new challenges.

Notes

¹ *Dagbon* refers to the traditional state of the Dagomba inside modern Ghana, or the area where the Dagomba people reside. *Dagomba* refers to the citizens or the people and *Dagbani* refers to the language of the people

² The meaning of “The Sahelian Factor in Northern Ghana” is two folded: First of all it is a term that we use to make a distinction between the Southern urban popular music industry of the Akan community in Ghana and the Northern popular music industry. Secondly we use the term to link the Northern parts of Ghana beyond Ghanaian boundaries to other Sahelian and Savannah – belt music traditions and urban music cultures in this part of Africa.

³ We got this information from the Bureau of Statistics in Tamale.

⁴ According to the Bureau of Statistics in Tamale: The Tamale metropolitan Assembly is located at the Centre of the Northern Region. It lies between latitude 9.29° and 9.34° North and longitudes 00.36° and 00.57°.

⁵ The theoretical framework of reciprocity, redistribution of goods and free trade is well describes by Karel Polanyi. See: K Polanyi, *The Great Transformations*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1944, pp.18.

⁶ E A Kennard, ‘Post – War economic Change Among the Hopi’, in *Essays in Economic Anthropology*, The 1965 Annual Spring Meeting, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1965, pp. 2-3.

⁷ Tamale population census 2007, according to the GeoNames geographical database.

⁸ “*The Yendi Skin Affaires*”, is the name given the clash and conflict of the Aburu - and the Andani family around the Paramount chieftaincy problems in Dagbon.

⁹ This information comes from my field notes of my upcoming dissertation: ” *Traditional Music and Dance in Ghana: Hybridization and Transformation Processes of the Traditional Music and Dance of the Dagomba of Northern Ghana.*” Unpublished manuscript. Parts of it were recorded during different conversations with informants. "Chef Zanjina (1648 - 1677) as Prince traveled to Hausa land to study the Koran and introduced Islam in *Dagbon*. After his return to *Dagbon*, he brought several aspects of the Hausa - court culture with them. He established the Hausa-musicians of the court in an area just outside the town in Yendi. These sites were crucibles of different African cultures. This area in town carry the name “*Zongo*”, which means neighborhood.

¹⁰ K Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*. Philosophical reflections on the African Experience, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997.

¹¹ M J Herkovits, *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1959.

¹² P Geschiere & B Meyer, *Readings in Modernity in Africa*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2008, pp. 2-3.

¹³ K.K.C., was the first Hiplife band in Tamale. They were a duo.

¹⁴ According to Ama de-Graft Aikin, Hiplife musicians from the Southern parts of Ghana prefer an old authentic sample from a highlife song and it must have a solid thumping beat.

¹⁵ “*Azindo*” is a male name. It is also a very popular song by Abu Sadiq, a local reggae artist in Tamale. The theme of the song is about *kaya yoo* and prostitution among teenage girls in Tamale.

¹⁶ The word “*Gala Gala*” means in Dagbani: “ Deviant behavior”. It is also a very popular Hiplife song by the local band Deensi.

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